



John Muir Correspondence (PDFs)

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1897-11-16

**Letter from John Muir to [Charles Sprague] Sargent, 1897 Nov 16.**

John Muir

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Martinez, Oct. 16. 1847

My dear Sargent.

I know very well what you have suffered on account of the deadly danger your daughter was in, for I have two daughters & years ago they were near to death. I see that poor good able & amiable Stiles is dead. This death, disease & pain business of our nature is horrible amid the joy & harmony of our blessed world. and we can only hope & trust that there is a still better world beyond this.

With this I return good Abbott's letters I think his estimate of Pinchot is just, I'm sorry to say. I thank you for letting me see them. Remember me to him when next you write. Making his acquaintance I always regard as the best gain of that true year.  
The venerable three H. fellow who calls you



Charlie must be very happy among his trees & flowers though so near jerry smoky Boston. My wife tells me that he must be the H. H. Hunnewell who has done so much for Landscape gardening. I hope to see him some day. I think by a stiff prodding letter I received a day or two ago that you must have been setting Atlantic Page on me. He wants me to write an Alaska book. I suppose I'll have to try it some day & may as well begin this winter But book making to sturdy you & Page is an easy matter to me it is precious hard, however I'll try. In the meantime I am writing a couple of articles on the parks & reserves.

Looking carefully over my old notes of 1879 & 80 I learn that I found Paton Hemlock in the Chilkat Pass at a height of 3000 feet above the sea & saw what I took to be the same tree nearly a Thousand feet higher.



This is the North<sup>3</sup>most point at which I saw it  
about Lat. 60. I also saw it in abundance  
on the east side of the Stikien Canon about  
50 miles from the sea at a height of 3000 feet.

I also found *Abies subalpina* & *Picea alba* on  
the headwaters of the Stikien & Mackenzie rivers.  
but ~~since~~ as I did not know these trees at  
the time I first saw them I will copy  
out a few of the original notes & let you  
judge for yourself.

"On the inland side of the general Coast Range  
(on the Stikien) a marked change of climate  
& consequently of forests occurs. The woods  
are younger & composed of smaller trees - a  
foot to 18 inches diameter & average height of  
about 70 feet. — Here the woods are dry at  
times & whole mountainsides are burned &  
covered with dead gray masts. The Cottonwood  
are small & the birch with a few pines, —  
contorta - mingle freely with the coast hemlock  
& Menzies Spruce. The birch is best on shady  
hill-sides & is very effective, giving striking character  
to the forest - their rounded, free, leafy, wind-obeying



heads of pale green mingling with the narrow  
 coast hemlock & spruce. The Tamarac pine  
 or Black pine as Contorta is called here  
 reserves its seeds for several years, & grows  
 well on sunny mountains, often alone,  
 making yellow-green growths to a height of  
 about 2000 feet, complying with the demands  
 of glacial sculpture in curves & belts.  
 It is here slender & arrowy, about 60 feet high.  
 its lower branches often killed but with fine tops.

There is another spruce here, more slender  
 & graceful than Menzies, drooping at top like  
 Paton, leaves shorter, not prickly-pointed, from  
 $\frac{3}{8}$  to  $\frac{5}{8}$  inches long, the branchlets also slender - on  
 flood bottoms some 125 feet high. near Glenora  
 140 miles from tidewater & 750 ft above it.  
 Comes in dense clusters covering the top of the tree  
 yellow & brown in color, not purple, some nearly  
 green, slender ovate long-pointed  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 inches long,  
 $\frac{5}{8}$  to  $\frac{7}{8}$  diameter - a very graceful beautiful tree."  
(Picea alba)?

In walking from Glenora (140 miles from  
 tidewater) to Telegraph Creek (155 miles from tidewater). The  
 trail follows the Stikine River benches, which are planted



with contorta poplar, & birch & a few piceas & spruces (*P. alba*, & *A. subalpina*), Contorta is the principal tree, slender, six to eight inches diameter. (One hundred miles farther inland) the timber in some places all willow in the low grounds, much exclusively poplar with a few pines (Contorta) & birches, & a few spruces along low grounds 50 ft high - no tree <sup>any</sup> today over 50 ft high. Thousand acre patches burned. Some green trees burned off at the roots which are on top of the frozen ground & easily killed in dry weather. Had a good view from a high point on the trail of a mountain spur about 6000 ft high which was timbered to a height of 5000 feet."

"Set out for the summit of a peak 7000 feet high back of Glenara, 140 miles from tide water. First there is a flat terrace about 200 feet above the Stickim & nearly a thousand feet above the sea. It is about a mile wide & stretches back to the slopes of Glenara Peak. It is covered with birch spruce (*Picea alba* & *menziesii*) & fir (*subalpina*) & poplar growing close & tall as compared with the girt.



of the trees. Large areas are burned & the ground is  
strewn with blackened poles. - From this terrace  
the mountain rises in steep slopes. The trees  
are chiefly spruce & a species of fir, <sup>(subalpina)</sup> the fir  
growing highest - even dwarfing at a height  
of about 5000 feet into lowly Chaparral.  
This dwarfing seems to be due as much to heavy  
snow as to altitude, for at the same elevation  
on ridges where the snow can never be deep  
we find both the dwarfed & erect forms  
close together. This fir forms the most beautiful  
Chaparral I ever saw. The flat thickly  
foliated plumes, broad & fan-shaped being  
imbricated over each other by the pressure  
of the snow so that the high slopes seem to  
be neatly & handsomely thatched. In this form  
it is seldom more than 3 or 4 feet high.  
Yet it bears fertile cones & seems thrifty  
& happy as if everything was to its mind.  
In this dwarfed form it reaches a height of  
5500 feet. At a height of 4000 feet few  
of the erect trees are more than 50 ft high.  
Some 60 ft in dia at the ground."  
"The pine & spruce of the region lying



between the head of Dease Lake &  
Telegraph Creek in great part give place  
to a handsome fir around the lake, &  
upward to the north & on the mountains.  
The tallest about a hundred feet, one foot  
diameter at ground, feathered with short  
branches from top to bottom. The cones  
are 3 inches long, one in diameter, dark purple,  
bracts short, dark colored, wings of seeds very  
dark. leaves  $\frac{5}{8}$  to  $\frac{7}{8}$  <sup>inches</sup> long, falcate, blunt,  
excepting those of leading shoots which are quite  
sharp. Mostly pale Yellow-green. The mountain-  
side on the west side of the Lake is forested  
with this tree. - leaves all around the branches".

This I guess is enough  
Goodbye. Remember me to good-  
bively boyish Cicuta Canby

Ever Yours

John Muir